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WHAT IS A CALL

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Gospel Ministry

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Rev. R. L. DABNEY, D. D.

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TO THE

GOSPEL MINISTRY.

BY THE

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RICHMOND:

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WHAT IS

A CALL TO THE MINISTRY.

The church has always held that none should preach the Gospel but those who are called of God. The solid proof of this is not to be sought in those places of the Scripture where a special divine call was given to Old Testament prophets and priests, or to apostles, although such passages have been often thus misapplied. (Among those misquoted texts should be reckoned Hebrews v. 4, which the Apostle there applies, not to ministers, but to priests, and especially to Christ.) The call of these peculiar classes was extraordinary, and by special revelation, suited to those days of theophanies and inspiration. But those days have now ceased, and God governs His church exclusively by His providence, and the Holy Spirit applying the written Scriptures. Yet there is a general analogy between the call of a prophet or apostle and that of a gospel preacher, in that both are, in some form, from God, and both summon men to a ministry for God. The true proof that none now should preach but those called of God, is rather to be found in such texts as Acts xx. 28, ("Take heed * * * to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers,") 1 Cor. xii. 28, &c.; and in the obvious reason, that the minister is God's ambassador, and the Sovereign alone can appoint such an agent.

What then is the call to the gospel ministry? Before the answer to this question is attempted, let us protest against the vague, mystical, and fanatical notions of a call, which prevail in many minds, fostered, we are sorry to admit, by not a little unscriptural teaching from Christians. People seem to imagine that some voice is to be heard, or some impression to be felt, or some impulse to be given to the soul, they hardly know what, or whence, which is to force the man into the ministry without rational or scriptural deliberation. And if this fantastic notion is not realized—as it is not like to be except among those persons of feverish imagination who, of all men, have least business in the pulpit—the young Christian is encouraged to conclude that he is exempt. Let the pious young man ask himself this plain question: Is there any other expression of God's will given to us except the Bible? Where else does God authorize us to look for information as to any duty? The call to the ministry then, is to be found, like the call to every other duty, in the teachings of God's revealed word. The Holy Spirit has ceased to give direct revelations: He speaks to no rational adult now through any other medium than His Word, applied by His gracious light to the understanding and conscience. To look for any thing else from Him is superstition. While the call of prophets and apostles was by *special revelation*, that of the gospel minister may be termed *a scriptural call.*

What then is a call to the gospel ministry? We answer: *it is an expression of the divine will that a man should preach the gospel.* To this another question succeeds: How does God now give a man that expression of His

will? We answer: He does it thus: by enlightening and influencing the man's conscience and understanding, and those of his Christian brethren, to understand the Bible truths, and the circumstances and qualifications in himself, which reasonably point out preaching as his work. The full and certain call to the ministry is uttered by the Holy Spirit, both to the candidate himself, and by the church. The medium of its utterance is God's dealing with the candidate and the principles of the written Scriptures. The object of these remarks will be secured, by explaining the above definition in a series of particulars.

1. First then, a call to preach is not complete until the Holy Spirit has uttered it, not only in the Christian judgment of the candidate himself, but in that of his brethren also. Their minds, taught of the Holy Ghost, and inspired by Him with spiritual principles and affections, recognize in the candidate a "brother beloved," fitted by his spiritual gifts for the ministry, and their utterance of this judgment is a part of his vocation. Sometimes, as in the case of Knox, the brethren anticipate the candidate's own conclusion in uttering this call; usually they follow it, by uttering it after he has acted so far on the probable evidence of a call, found in his own Christian judgment, as to prepare himself to preach. And it is manifest that the candidate must necessarily, in common cases, proceed so far as his preparation, on the incomplete evidence he finds in himself, greatly confirmed indeed, by the advice of individual brethren; because the church cannot usually judge his probable call, until he prepares himself.

2. The principles of Scripture which the Spirit will

employ to instruct him and his brethren as to the divine will, are such as these: That "it pleases God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe!" 1 Cor. i: 21. Rom. x: 14. That every man is bound to render to God the highest service and love which his circumstances and capacities admit; Deut. vi: 5. Matt. xxii: 37. That "we are not our own, for we are bought with a price, and must therefore glorify God in our bodies and spirits which are His:" 1 Cor. xi: 20. Rom. xiii: 1. That "whether therefore we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we must do all to the glory of God." 1 Cor. x: 31. That the work of him who is permitted to preach the gospel, is of all others most excellent; Titus iii: 1. James v: 20. Daniel xii: 3. And that every Christian has been redeemed from his sin and death by the Saviour, for no other purpose than this, that he shall be that, and do that, by which he can best glorify his Lord. Acts xxvi: 16. Eph. i: 6. These Scriptures, and a hundred others, plainly teach, that the only condition of discipleship permitted by Christ to any believer, is complete self-consecration to His service. In this, the self-devotion of the minister is just the same as that of all other true Christians. If a Christian man proposes to be a teacher, physician, lawyer, mechanic, or farmer, it must be, not chiefly from promptings of the world or self, but chiefly because he verily believes he can, in that calling, best serve his heavenly master. If he hath not this consecration, we do not say he is unfit for the ministry only; he is unfit to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. If any man think this standard of dedication too strict, let him understand at once, that he is "not fit for the kingdom of

God;" let him relinquish his delusive hope of salvation; let him at once go back among the dark company of Christ's enemies, on the ground scathed and riven by the lightnings of His wrath, and under the mountainous load of all his sins unatoned and unforgiven. There is no other condition of salvation. For did not Christ redeem the whole man? Did He not purchase with His blood all our powers, and our whole energies, if we are His disciples. We profess to desire to love Him with our whole souls; and therefore, what reason is there, which demands a part of the exertion and service in our power, which does not also demand the whole? That professor of religion who contents himself with exerting for his Saviour a portion only of the efficiency for which his capacities enable him, confesses himself a hypocrite. The *modicum* of religious effort which he renders, is not truly rendered to Christ, but to self-righteousness, or to a guilty conscience, or to public opinion. Had the motives which exacted this partial service been genuine, they would assuredly have exacted the whole. Let every young Christian heed this solemn truth, and the question of the ministry will be relieved of its indistinctness. For then, the question of the profession in which he shall serve God will be seen, by every Christian, to be only the relative one as to his own capacities, and the demands of God's cause at that time.

This leads us to add another important class of texts, by which the Holy Spirit will inform the judgment both of the candidate and his brethren as to his call. It is that class in which God defines the qualifications of a minister of the gospel. Let every reader consult, as the fullest specimens, 1 Timothy iii: 1—7. Titus i:

6—9. The inquirer is to study these passages, seeking the light of God's Spirit to purge his mind from all clouds of vanity, self-love, prejudice; in order to see whether he has, or can possibly acquire, the qualifications here set down. And his brethren, under the influence of the same Spirit, must candidly decide by the same standard, whether they shall call him to preach or not.

3. Our definition of the call to preach asserted that God would make known His will to the candidate and to his brethren, not only through the medium of the Scriptures, but also of outward circumstances and qualifications viewed in the light of Scripture truth. Much has been said by Christians concerning "the leadings of Providence," touching the duty of preaching, and many other duties. And not a little nonsense, with perhaps some profanity, has been uttered on the subject. It is true that everything which befalls us is determined by God's special providence; for which reason, we justly conclude, that in many cases, an occurrence, after it has happened, is a real expression to us of God's will. But there is another truth, that the designs of God's special providence are chiefly reserved among the awful secrets of His own fathomless wisdom. He forbids us to attempt to surmise His secret purpose, from the apparent tendencies of His sovereign dealings, and pointedly remands us to "the law and testimony" for our practical guidance. The light which "providences" cast upon the question of God's will as to our conduct, is chiefly cast backward on the past; not forward on the future. The man who attempts to frame the "leadings of Providence" into an indication of duty, instead of

resorting to His revealed will, is often in danger of wickedly intruding into those secrets which belong to the Lord our God, and of profanely foisting the selfish leanings of his own inclination upon the Holy One, as the teaching of His acts.

There are indeed, certain dispensations of Providence, which, in the light of the Word, do clearly reveal God's will. If He has deprived any man of the health, the voice, or the knowledge, without which he cannot possibly preach, and has made it absolutely impossible to acquire or regain them; or, if He has surrounded a man with clear, unavoidable duties, which cannot possibly be postponed or delegated, and which are clearly incompatible with the ministry; here is indeed a sure expression of the divine will that he may not preach. But it has often been said, in well-meant treatises on the call to the ministry, that a Christian may know whether God designs him to preach, by the providential facilities which open, or hindrances which seem to bar, the entrance into the sacred office. This rule is to be accepted with many "grains of allowance." If God has facilitated the acquisition of the suitable learning, and the other means for preaching, it does indeed present a probable evidence that the person may be called. But the converse is not true. If circumstances have hedged up the young Christian's access to the ministry with obstacles, difficulties, hardships; we freely admit that all these are determined by God's special purpose and providence. But *we do not know what God means by them.* He has not told that young Christian whether He means to tell him thereby that he must not preach, or whether He means it for "the trial

of his faith, that being much more precious than gold that perisheth, it may be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ." Let that man therefore take heed, how he presumptuously misinterprets a Providence which God has not authorized him to read at all; let him turn to the Bible and to prayer. How plausibly might the great Apostle have argued after the modern fashion, when he met ship-wreck, scourging, prisons, stoning, wanderings, neglect, poverty, in the prosecution of his ministry, that "the *leadings of Providence*" clearly indicated he was not called to a foreign mission! But he argued no such thing; he knew better. He said: "None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus." Does the reader object that Paul had a revealed call; but we common mortals must judge by just these providential events, which he properly disregarded. Let us take then the case of Dr. Wm. Carey, the great Baptist missionary to Hindostan. When he first began to seek his duty, a poor shoemaker, with a growing family already upon his hands, without classical learning, without money, without patronage, with the power of the East India company so arrayed against the gospel, that it was forbidden to all their ships even to carry a missionary across the ocean; might not he have plausibly concluded, according to this argument, that "the leadings of Providence" were against him? But who can now doubt that he was called of God, first to become a preacher of the gospel, and then to begin the Serampoore mission? By this cowardly argument,

Washington would have judged the "leadings of Providence" to be against the cause of his country. But why mention the ten thousand cases, in which history shows us, the noblest enterprises were conducted to success, with the final blessing of Providence, as no one now doubts, only by braving obstacles almost insuperable? If then, the young Christian is surrounded with outward hindrances, it is his duty to ask, "Is it possible for me lawfully to conquer them, by the most strenuous exertions of my best faculties, nerved by deathless love for Christ?" If it is, then it may be his duty to preach.

4. The Scriptures which define the necessary qualifications of the minister may be digested, in substance, into the following particulars: He must have *a hearty and healthy piety*, a *fair reputation* for *holiness* of *life*, *a respectable force of character*, some *Christian experience*, and *aptness to teach*. Let us repeat the remark, that these particulars are given by the Holy Spirit as a rule by which the church is to judge in calling, as well as the candidate in obeying the call. And let us remark also, with emphasis, once for all, that the young Christian, in concluding whether he possess these qualifications, should attach much weight to the opinion of judicious, Christian friends, yea even more than to his own; because men are often more in the dark, by reason of self-love, concerning their own characters, than their acquaintances.

The first requisite is *piety*. All Protestants are agreed, that it is preposterous to set that man to expound the Gospel, who neither understands, nor loves, nor believes it. And the weighty responsibilities and cares of the minister require that his piety should be,

if not eminent, at least of a vigorous and healthy type. But here, the young Christian should take heed to an important distinction. As far as the church and its officers are concerned, it is perfectly just, that they should refuse to call or ordain one whose piety is not hearty. But, it by no means follows that he may excuse himself from the duty of preaching, because he is conscious his piety is low. If he reasons thus, he insults God; for how comes it that his piety is low, except by his own fault? Is not the mercy seat open to him, at which he may obtain increase of grace, if he will seek? Those states of feeling and principle which stamp his piety as feeble, are every one SINS; and so is that neglect of prayer and means, by which his grace has been stinted. It is *his duty* to be an eminent Christian; yea, a perfect Christian. Now, woe to that servant who obtrudes against his Master one transgression, as a justification for a second? It is adding insult to rebellion. And if a man feels that he has not grace enough to preach, he should ask himself whether he has grace enough to serve and please God in any other calling, grace enough to die with, or enough to enable him to enter the awful world of spirits, and stand in an awful judgment. To such a man we solemnly say: there is but one thing you can do, if you would not outrage your God, grieve the Holy Ghost, and run an imminent risk of sealing your own damnation! Do not, indeed, enter the ministry with feeble piety; but at once seek and obtain a hearty piety, in order that you may properly enter the ministry, if it is God's will. In one word, the fact that one's piety is low cannot prove it is not his duty to preach; because he knows it is his immediate duty not

to let his piety remain low. That fact is, on the other hand, sufficient evidence to his Christian brethren, that, if he *will not* do his duty in seeking more eminent piety, they ought not to call him.

In this connexion may be best mentioned another qualification, on which some pious writers have said much, and sometimes very indiscreetly. It is the possession of a *strong desire;* the necessity of which is argued from 1 Tim. iii: 1. "If a man desire the office of a bishop, (pastor) he desireth a good work." It is obvious that such an inference from this passage might be easily pushed too far. The same distinction applies here, which has been stated in the last paragraph. Of course, the church ought not to entrust the ministry to a man who has no heart to work. The true minister must of course have a desire to see souls snatched from hell fire, truth upheld, sin curbed, the happiness of true religion diffused, and the Holy Trinity glorified in the redemption of transgressors. These are the grounds, the motives, of that desire which he feels to preach, if he may rightfully do it. But are not these feelings common, essential, to all true Christians? Does not the absence of them place a very black mark on any man's piety? The church, therefore, in judging a candidate's fitness to be called, will be influenced by his possessing this kind of desire, just as they will by his possessing a healthy piety; and for the same reasons. Hence it is that our "Form of Government," very properly requires the candidate for ordination to answer, yes, to this question: (See Form of Government, ch. xv: §12, Ques. 5.)

"Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to seek the office of the Holy ministry from

love to God, and a sincere desire to promote His glory in the gospel of His Son?"

But how foolish and mischievous is the perversion of this Scriptural truth, to argue, as some have seemed to do, that therefore, if a young Christian does not feel an *abiding and strong desire* for this special work, he ought to conclude that he is not called? Is it so forsooth, that if a man, to whom God has given the capacities and opportunities to do a certain labourious work for His glory, feel himself sinfully reluctant to it, because of a selfish and cowardly fear of its toils and self-denials, or because of a false and wicked shame, or because ambition and covetousness rather impell him to a different calling; he may therefore conclude that he is exempt from all obligations to it? Nay, verily. It is that man's duty to repent immediately of this his reluctance, and to crucify it; for *it is* SIN. How can a man be, what every Christian ought to be, except he earnestly desire God's glory in the salvation of souls? But the minister can usually do more, *caeteris paribus*, for this cause, than the layman: so that every true Christian on the earth, young and old, male and female, ought to feel with reference to the work of preaching, that he would be glad to preach, if God permitted him. Away with the notion, that the young man is not called to preach, unless he hath *fallen in love* with this special work, in some senseless and unaccountable manner, as though pierced with the invisible arrow of some spiritual Eros, or Cupid! It is nonesense, it is wickedness. The Holy Spirit is a rational being, the Bible is a rational book, and every Christian emotion which He produces in the human soul by applying Bible truth, is

produced according to the laws of the human understanding; it is a reasonable emotion, prompted by reasonable and intelligent views of truth.

If we regard the Scriptures, we certainly find there, very little support for the necessity of this unaccountable desire. In the 3d and 4th chapters of Exodus, we read that Moses, when commissioned by God to become the prophet of Israel, displayed his reluctance by so many excuses that the divine wrath was excited. Jeremiah (i: 6 and xx: 9) similarly deprecated the sacred charge. Jonah sought to flee the work; at what cost, the reader knows. And Paul says, 1 Cor. ix: 16:—"Though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of; for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." He felt that he could claim no credit, because he dared not exercise any option concerning the ministry; but was impelled by the awful conviction that he could only evade this duty at the peril of his soul.

If, therefore, the young Christian does not feel this Scriptural desire to glorify God by saving souls, so that he would be glad to do it by *preaching* if he might, he ought not indeed, to thrust himself into the ministry like a slave going to a hated task. But he ought immediately to suspect himself of some most unchristian influence of selfishness, indolence, vanity, ambition or avarice; he ought immediately to crucify these base feelings at the foot of his Saviour's cross; he ought never to rest, till his heart is in such a frame that the desire to do good (in any way God may point out) is his ruling passion, and he ought to do all this, wholly irrespective of his finding his way into the ministry or

not. For while his heart is in its present frame, he has no sufficient evidence that he has ever felt the love of God, and that he has not the wrath of God and the daily danger of hell fire abiding on him. Certainly, without this pious desire, he is as truly unfit to serve God in any other calling, as in the ministry.

The three qualifications next mentioned, a fair reputation for sanctity of life, a respectable moral force of character, and some degree of Christian experience, may be grouped together. The man whose Christian character does not command confidence and respect, would, as a minister, only dishonour God and His cause. Yet, it is every man's duty to reform those inconsistencies by which he has forfeited the respect of mankind, whether he is to preach or not. And having thoroughly reformed them, he may find his way open into the pulpit. The minister must have some force of character. The feeble, undecided, shuffling man, who cannot rule his own family, nor impress and govern his inferiors by his moral force, had better not preach. There may be cases where this weakness of character is found incurable, although co-existing with genuine piety. Again; he must not be in the novitiate of his Christian profession. But this circumstance can very rarely be a valid obstacle to the young Christian's proceeding so far as to begin his preparation. Our church has made this preparation long; for this reason, among others, that the neophyte may acquire Christian experience by the time he comes to his ordination.

The last qualification mentioned is *aptness to teach*. The apostle means by this, that assemblage of bodily and mental endowments, which will, by due cultivation,

enable the pastor to teach God's truth with reasonable efficiency. It includes sufficient bodily strength, an understanding of fair respectability, either the possession of, or the opportunity and ability to acquire, adequate knowledge, and a capacity to attain a tolerable fluency and propriety of speech. Such disease or infirmity as would make it impossible to live and perform the duties of a minister efficiently, is a clear indication that a man is not called. But this fact cannot be fairly inferred from every grade of bodily infirmity. Let the reader consider how much a Calvin, a Brainerd, a Payson, effected for Christ, in spite of bodies bowed down by chronic disease. Yet no one now doubts that God called them to preach. And the perseverance of many resolute men in the laborious professions of this world, for the sake of mammon or ambition, in spite of feeble health, is a most practical evidence, that bodily weakness does not necessarily prove the Christian to be precluded from the ministry.

Many young Christains again, excuse themselves by professing a doubt whether they have natural talents adequate to so responsible a work as the ministry. (We fear that, in many cases, if their friends were to concur candidly in this doubt, their vexation would betray the insincerity of the pretended humility.) Now, we freely assent, that Christ has no use for fools in the pulpit. The impotent, beggarly, confused understanding should not undertake to teach other minds. And the very noblest capacities are desirable, and will find ample scope in this glorious work. But nothing more than respectable good sense and justness of mind is requisite to secure such usefulness in the ministry, as

should decide any pious heart, if that mind is used to the best advantage. Let the *heart* be warmed and ennobled with Christian love; the good common *mind* will be expanded and invigorated, and a conscientious diligence will give it an indefinite and constant improvement. Love and labour will make the small mind great. The late memoir of Dr. Daniel Baker contains an instructive testimony on this point. His energy and success in the gospel led some to remark, how eminent he might have been in worldly pursuits; what a *millionaire*, if a merchant; how eloquent, if a lawyer; how popular, if a statesman! But his biographer, who is his own son, says: No; it was his religion that was his strength; grace alone made him great. Blessed be God, the church has often found that plain talents, faithfully improved for God, by love and zeal, have accomplished the largest good. Let the young Christian then judge his own qualification by these truths. It is clear that, in the general, the church must always expect to find her ministers, precisely among those who honestly appraise their talents moderately. For who would like to see the young Christian come forward and say: "that he felt called to preach *because he considered himself so smart!*"

The scholarship which the Presbyterian church considers necessary for the minister, may be seen described in our "Form of Government." To the acquisition of this, any sound mind is adequate, with diligence and perseverance. Such is the provision which is made for aiding the needy, no Christian, except one too far advanced in life, or precluded by other duties, can plead inability to acquire it. And if there be difficulties or

hardships in the way, it may be the will of God that he should manfully surmount them, for His sake.

Once more; the incurable stammerer, the man of totally diseased throat, the man who cannot acquire the capacity of speaking in public without a slowness, rudeness, confusion, or hesitation, painful to the hearers, is not called to preach. Public speaking is the most prominent function of the pastor. But there is scarcely any qualification about which young Christians are more apt to reason delusively. The promise of fluency in early manhood, is no sufficient proof of fitness for the pulpit; and the lack of it at that season is no evidence whatever of unfitness. Experience shows that many who early win the reputation of "the college orator," in actual life sink into obscurity; and many who go through college without a particle of reputation for fluency, become afterwards famous as effective speakers. And let the reader remember, that a minister may be effective without being melodious, polished, or graceful. No young man, whose vocal organs are not fatally maimed, is entitled to conclude, because he is now unskilled, that he cannot learn to speak to edification. On the contrary, he should conclude that he *can learn* to speak, no matter what his difficulty, if only he will endeavour and persevere. Such is the emphatic testimony of Lord Chesterfield to his son; and he declares that his own eloquence (of no mean fame in his day) was wholly the result of his perseverance. There was a candidate for the ministry in the Presbyterian church, who even after he commenced his Seminary course, stammered painfully. But he resolved, by God's help, to conquer the obstacle; and he is now a most fluent

and impressive extempore preacher. There is a most mischievous mistake as to the nature of good speaking. It is but unaffected, serious, perspicuous *talking*. That which is simplest is best. That language which presents the idea with the most transparent naturalness, is in the best style. Who is there in his senses that cannot *talk*, when he is interested? The man of plain good sense, whose mind is thoroughly informed with divine truth, and whose heart is instinct with divine love, will not fail to find words and utterance.

5. The young Christian is bound also to consider the present wants of the church, and the relation of supply to demand. The propriety of taking all this into his account, is not only obvious to common sense, but asserted by our Saviour himself (Matt. ix : 37) when he makes the fact that "the harvest is plenteous, but the labourers few," the ground of the prayer, that God would "send forth labourers into His harvest." How can one answer the question aright, "Where does God most need me?" without considering the necessities of His church? Christ has made it the duty of every Christian in the world to offer this prayer. Is not the pious young man mocking God when he offers it, if he is not willing God shall send him into the harvest? Now it is true in our day, that the harvest is plenteous, and that *suitable labourers* are comparatively few. Our home destitutions are large, and many of them of long standing, and rather increasing in number. The supply of young ministers barely repairs the waste of death and removals. For the whole pagan world we may be said to be doing nothing, in consequence of the paucity

of young ministers; (for we have only one soul from the whole Synod of Virginia, a godly female, labouring on pagan ground.) And for the teeming multitudes of the new commonwealths springing up in the West and South, we are doing almost as little. But the young Christian, in considering the necessities of the sacred cause, is bound to consider not only the harvest at home, but everywhere; for "the field is the world." Only one word need be said to remind him how loud and imperative is the call, created by the gracious and amazing openings which God is now making over the whole world, for missionary effort. It is a trumpet blast, summoning the whole church to arise and reap. Does the wise God sound a blast which He has provided no servants to hear? Openings for ministerial labour are created by the same God who watches over the church, renews souls by His grace, and endows His servants with the capacities for serving Him. The prudent farmer only plants so many fields as he has provided labourers to till. The wise manufacturer apportions his machinery and materials to the force at his disposal. It seems a very reasonable inference that when God sets open so many doors for usefulness before His church, He at the same time gives her sufficient numbers and qualifications to occupy as many. If God has made ten openings for useful ministerial labour, for every candidate who presents himself, the inference is very plain, that there must be nine men to every ten of these fields, somewhere in the Church, whom God calls to preach, but who refuse to go. When, on the one hand, we consider the vast and glorious fields for evangelical enterprise beckoning us on, well may we, on the other hand,

stand aghast at the extent of the recreancy to duty which must exist in the church!

This fact, that an extensive and alarming neglect of the claims of the pulpit prevails in the Church, constitutes an additional and most pressing reason, that every young Christian who can, should weigh well his own duty in that respect. When the kingdom is invaded, and the citizens lag towards the rear, the true men may fairly conclude that they are the more likely to be needed; and they should expect, they should be listening for, the summons of their King. So in our generation Jesus Christ is calling to His church, by the woes of perishing myriads, and by the critical conjuncture of such opportunities for evangelizing them as the world never saw before, and may never see again, for a thousand soldiers of the cross. But only a few here and there sluggishly and dubiously respond. Does even this cruel emergency justify any citizen of Zion to seize the sword uncalled by his King? By no means. But it vividly suggests the expectation, that He is calling, or is about to call, many to the warfare; whence every young christian should, at such a time, listen more heedfully to the voice of the Word and the Spirit.

If there is force in these reasonings, they have a most sad and peculiar application to the young Christians of Virginia. For bad as is the case in the rest of the Presbyterian church, among us it is worse still. A careful calculation shows, that the ratio which the number of our candidates bears to the numbers of our communicants, is not only far smaller than that observed in other favoured sections of the church, but smaller than the average in the whole church, and only larger than

that in the newest, most destitute, and sparsest Synods. The territory of Virginia is chiefly covered by the Synod of Virginia. In it there are not less than fifty ministers, born, converted, and trained for the ministry in other States, engaged in our service as pastors, teachers and editors. But after subtracting the infirm, we shall probably find scarcely a hundred active ministers, positively engaged in the public service of the church. So that, for half our own supply, we are now indebted to the help of other sections of the Presbyterian church, less oppressed than ours with a benumbing worldliness, and more alive to the love of God! Perhaps some one may say that this sad account should be counterbalanced by the numbers of ministers who have gone from the Presbyterian church in Virginia, to other States. After a careful inspection of the catalogue of three thousand names, composing the ministry in the whole United States, we do not believe that there are forty who were reared in the churches of Virginia. So that, after full allowance for this counterpoise, we find that we do not produce ministers enough to keep up our own numbers; but for the kind aid of better people abroad we should be dying out, starved to death by our own worldliness. Here then is a church one hundred years old, strong in numbers, equipped with adequate and accessible schools for the training of her sons. Now, if any church under heaven should be expected, not only to keep up her former *status* from her own resources, but to possess all the means for a rapid and vigorous progress at home, and to make liberal contributions of men and money for evangelizing the sister States which are springing into their giant

youth, and the wide world of heathenism, surely such a church should. If such as she may be excused from this, how, in the possibility of things, is the world ever to be saved? But lo, instead of doing this, she is still leaning in part like a dependent weakling, on other sections! Here the Lord hath opened up what he proposed should be a perennial spring, which should not only keep its own basin filled to the brim, but send out streams of life, flowing ever farther and farther, to water the desert sands that lie burning with spiritual drought, around it. But instead of this, the water must be brought from other less faithless fountains, and continually poured into it, to prevent its drying up. Is it then a living spring? Or is it a stagnant pool, absorbing uselessly in its sands, the waters of life that, elsewhere, might carry fruitfulness and verdure? And will not its Lord at last tire of the unproductive toil; and leave it to be trampled over until its place can no longer be found? It is but too evident, somewhere among the young men of the Presbyterian church in our State, there is wide-spread and terrible guilt, because of this neglect of the claims of the pulpit. Let every such Christian ask with trembling: "Lord, is it I?" And it is equally plain that this fact constitutes a special and solemn reason that every young man who can preach, should weigh well whether it is not his duty to set a better example.

Meantime the argument is greatly strengthened by the fact, that all other useful professions, except perhaps that of Christian teachers, are full to overflowing. Go where we may, we see more merchants than can find customers, more physicians than have patients, more

lawyers than clients. Society has enough of them—too many. But, to supply all our home destitutions, to carry the gospel to every one of the 800,000,000 of pagans on our globe, the church needs a hundred times as many ministers. Now what young Christain, qualified to preach, who asks in the spirit of the true convert: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" can say in view of these facts, that *God and his fellow men have more need for him in the bar, behind the counter, or in the physician's calling, than in the pulpit?* If he cannot, let him beware how he neglects the prayerful examination of the duty of preaching, at the peril of the wrath of his Saviour. We hesitate not to say, that, while all Christians of course are not to be preachers, and while none should preach whom God does not call; in such a time as ours, every Christian who can preach, should conclude that the *a priori* probabilities in his case, are such as to demand a deliberate and prayerful examination of the whole subject, until he arrives at a clear, satisfactory and scriptural answer to the question already suggested: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

But many say: "I admit the obligation to choose that calling in which I can most glorify God; let me therefore be a pious lawyer, or physician, in order that I may show these very influential, but often irreligious professions, the right example; and thus begin a revolution in their religious condition. Thus I may do more good than even in the pulpit. Or let me be a pious teacher; for do not some such teachers, enjoying the privilege of moulding the ductile minds of youth, do more for Christ than many pastors, to say nothing of the secular benefits of their labours?"

There are two very conclusive answers. First, while we admit, with sorrow, that there are many inefficient pastors; and while we bless God that there are some noble laymen who save more souls than some ministers; we ask, how the latter case is to be explained? It is always because those devoted laymen exhibit an eminent zeal and love for souls, a perseverance in efforts to do good, a self-denial, a good sense, a prudence, which would have infallibly placed them in the very front rank of ministerial usefulness, if they had been ministers, and had enjoyed a similar blessing from God in their labours. A Matthew Hale, a Harlan Page, a Samuel Budgett, may indeed be favourably compared with your ill-trained, inactive, common place ministers; but can he be compared, in Christian usefulness, with a Baxter, a Payson, a Chalmers? The truth is, the direct and main work of the minister is to save souls; the direct and main work of secular professions is to secure temporal good; and though the motive of all these secular labours, in the case of Christian laymen, is pious, their efforts to save souls are incidental and exceptional; their main, direct work is worldly. It is simple absurdity to say, that a given amount of qualification and devotedness may do as much for eternal objects, working for them incidentally, as though it wrought for them directly and mainly. But second, how does the young Christian, who turns aside from the sacred calling to medicine, and especially to the law, know that he shall be able to maintain that eminent piety, which alone will prevent his becoming a reproach to Christ in those worldly professions? His plea for entering them is founded on this ground in part; that

those important and influential professions are now so unfortunately devoid of Christian principle. Aye! How comes this to be so? How comes it that many lawyers, professing Christ, have sunk to a grade of spirituality so low, that the salt of grace is still urgently needed to be cast into the profession? Must it not be because the temptations of this calling are so potent, so fatal? Then, if this young Christian thinks that *he forsooth*, has strength enough to stand, where so many predecessors, lawyers professing Christ, have fallen, there is clear revelation of a spiritual pride, of an ignorance of his own heart, which make it very certain that his fall, when he becomes a Christian lawyer, will be most speedy and ignominious of all. "A haughty spirit goeth before a fall." "He that trusteth his own heart is a fool."

6. We have now defined and limited the qualification laid down in the Scriptures, and indicated in the providence of God, so as to show in what manner, and with what cautions, the inquirer is to reason upon them. Let us gather up the sum of the matter. The divine will is to be learned from these teachings of the Scriptures, and of events interpreted by Scripture, all studied under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, obtained through prayer. The reader will observe, that in all our remarks, we have supposed him viewing every evidence of a call to preach, *as a reasonable creature.* The whole process has been treated as one to be conducted according to the natural laws of the human understanding. We have treated it thus, because we are assured that the Holy Spirit always operates on human souls in accordance with those laws, when He instructs them by the Holy

Scriptures—(His only instrument for rational adults.) But let us not be mistaken. The process by which the call is ascertained is strictly reasonable; but it is also spiritual. The true minister is as really "taught of God," concerning this call, as the prophet in the revealed word was; it is only that the mode of the teaching is different. If a young Christian "leans to his own understanding" in this matter, the deceptions of spiritual pride, self-confidence, love of applause, drawing him towards the pulpit; or of false shame, indolence, carnality, secular ambition, avarice, or other inordinate desire, drawing him away, will infallibly befool him. He will decide wrong. He must conduct his inquiry under the superintendance of the Holy Ghost, purifying and elevating his Christian affections, crucifying his carnal inclinations, infusing a genuine love of God and souls, and thus illuminating his understanding to comprehend the Word. There is none but the Spirit of God that can do these things in the soul of the young Christian so as to secure a safe decision. This Spirit will come indeed, not through the medium of a voice, a vision, an inspiration; but through the channels of the Christian's own conscience, judgment, and sanctified affections. Yet his coming is not the less necessary and real. Ye shall know His presence "by His fruits." Those fruits will be a sweet consciousness of a meek, docile temper, and of thorough sincerity of purpose, a revival of divine love and zeal, and a joyous self-abnegation, resulting at length in a calm, satisfying decision of the great question.

7. Last then, to obtain this spiritual guidance, prayer must be fervently and incessantly offered. The

very act of unveiling the whole heart with transparent sincerity, before the Infinite Majesty, will itself still the clamour of carnality, and prove as "Euphrasy and rue," to purge the mental vision. God has promised also: "The meek will I guide in judgment, and the weak will I teach My way." "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth liberally, and upbraideth not." But let the Christian take care that he ask with a "meek" spirit, with profound honesty of soul, with utter submission of all prejudices and inclinations. Woe to that man who, while he professes to submit the question to God's decision, mocks the Heart-searcher by bringing his own decision to the throne of grace, prejudicated in the secret places of a selfish heart! And the danger is not only on the side of running uncalled; but also, of tarrying when he ought to run. The sin of preaching the gospel without God's call has been preposterously equalled to that of Uzzah, (2 Sam. vi: 6,) or of Nadab and Abihu, (Levit. x.) All the differences of a typical worship, a theocratic government, and a miraculous separation of the sacred office, are overlooked in such a comparison. To intrude into the pulpit without a call is doubtless a sin; for no man possessing such means of instruction and promises of divine light as the Bible affords him, can make this mistake, except from the predominance of sinful motives or the neglect of prayer and inquiry. It is a sin which is likely to bring mischief upon the church, and chastisement and repentance on the mistaken child of God. But to stay out of the pulpit when called to enter it, is also a sin, a sin which can only proceed from evil motives, and which must naturally result in the damnation of souls

which should have been saved through the disobedient Christian's preaching, but were not; and which must bring him under the frown and chastisement of an offended Saviour.

The Christian who has begun this inquest and prayer, but is not conscious of the sweet, enlightening influences of the Spirit in his examination, may by no means conclude that, therefore, he is not to preach. For the influences of the Holy Ghost are as truly needed, to answer the great question rightfully in the negative, as in the affirmative. Is there not a possibility of error and sin on either hand? If then the reader has felt that while he investigated, he did not enjoy those influences, let him by no means conclude that God exempts him from the sacred office; let him rather infer that he is under the hidings of God's countenance, that he is a backsliding Christian, and that he is, therefore, in imminent danger of perdition.

We conclude with this final caution. The claims of the ministry on Christian young men are so strong, that in many cases the head cannot misunderstand them, though the reluctant heart may shrink from them. Such cases often result thus: the undecided Christian says, "I will investigate farther, I will give myself time, and meantime I will teach, or seek some temporary business," or he says, "I will preach; I cannot dispute the duty; but I am young; two or three years hence will be time enough." And then, under this deceitful plea, he plunges unnecessarily into secular business, till its trammels, or the new affections of married life, or some fancied necessity settle the question; and the man *never preaches*. Show us the case where such a retraction of

the better resolution is not evidence of, yea synonymous with, spiritual decline! Ah, how many are there now, in the secular professions, keen, money-loving lawyers, busy politicians, indolent dilettanti, fallen drunkards, degraded reprobates, who were once promising Christians, and whose apostacy began just in this way? Look, young, hesitating professor at the dire fate of a Balaam. He professed to seek the Lord's will, and he received an expression of it, which he dared not dispute. Well would it have been for him, if he had then ceased inquiring, and gone at once to obeying. But the deceitfulness of his heart prompted him to what he supposed, was a middle course. "He would not proceed in the teeth of the Lord's will; oh no, not he! not for worlds. But he would enquire again." And the result was, that he got no answer from God better than the first; but he secured the damnation of his own soul. To say that you will "consider farther of the matter," after God has made an end of consideration by giving light enough to settle the question, is but virtual disobedience. There is then no time to consider; it is time to act. If you are prepared at present to preach, and God calls you to preach, then He calls you to preach now. If you have preparation to make, and God calls you to preach, He calls you to begin that preparation now. For a perishing world needs you now: while you causelessly hesitate, souls drop into hell. "TO-DAY, IF YE WILL HEAR HIS VOICE, HARDEN NOT YOUR HEARTS."

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THE GREAT COMMISSION.

"GO, preach My gospel," said the Lord,
Bid the whole earth My grace receive:
He shall be saved who trusts My word;
He shall be damned that won't believe.

"I'll make your great commission known,
And ye shall prove My gospel true,
By all the works that I have done,
By all the wonders ye shall do.

"Go, heal the sick, go raise the dead,
Go, cast out devils in My name:
Nor let My prophets be afraid,
Though Greeks reproach, and Jews blaspheme.

"Teach all the nations My commands;
I'm with you till the world shall end;
All power is trusted to My hands,
I can destroy, and can defend."

He spake, and light shone round His head;
On a bright cloud to Heaven He rode;
They to the farthest nations spread
The grace of their ascended God.